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AUTHOR Wolf-Schein, Enid G.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a method of language intervention, Structured Methods in Language Education (SMILE), used with students having severe language disabilities due to such factors as autistic disorder, central auditory dysfunction, impaired hearing, or mental handicap. SMILE develops a hierarchy of skills leading from phonology to morphology to syntax. It starts with the smallest unit of language, the phoneme, which is immediately associated with its written representation, the grapheme. As soon as the sound system and a number of words have been learned, syntax is taught through linguistic string formulas and sentence patterns. The teaching progresses from simple to complex at each level of the curriculum. The SMILE approach also incorporates development of attention, specific and consistent teaching methodology, use of structure and routine, immediate reinforcement, successive approximations leading to exact repetition, pattern practice and substitution/transformation drills, and ongoing attention to generalization. Student learning and progress is shared with parents by means of individualized "books" showing new skills. (DB)

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Structured Methods in Language Education: SMILE

Enid G. Wolf-Schein, Ed.D., CCC-SLP

University of Alberta

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Most pupils learn language naturally; their verbal communication unfolds gradually until they reach an ability to converse in an adult manner. Other pupils do not acquire language in a reasonable time, causing concern to their families and educational programs. The procedure most often applied to correct the difficulty is intensive language stimulation —that is, an attempt to amplify the natural conditions in order to facilitate the development of absent or delayed language. Where the cause of speech and language delay has been lack of stimuli, or other problems with the environment, such a "natural language" approach is likely to work. However, there are instances where the problem cannot be corrected by just doing more of the same. A radically different strategy needs to be implemented. It appears that for some pupils words must be broken down into their basic elements, phonemes, and speech needs to be taught from the "bottom up" using a highly structured phonetic method This alternative type of intervention can produce excellent results in the face of a number of inhibiting factors, such as: autistic disorder, central auditory dysfunction, impaired hearing, mental handicap or other problems causing difficulty in the learning of language.

This article will describe such a method, Structured Methods in Language Education (SMILE), in detail.

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The Subjects

In most cases pupils with severe language disabilities come from a normal language environment. Many have been provided with special intensive efforts to encourage acquisition of speech and language. Yet they still seem confused and unable to apply sounds and words to communicate. These are pupils who do not imitate easily or generalize readily; they may memorize a word for a particular object but not apply it to a similar object. Often, they seem to have problems with auditory memory. Such pupils may lack expressive speech in the presence or absence of language comprehension. Frequently the cause of their difficulty is unknown. In other cases the problem occurs because the pupils cannot hear and even though they may have language concepts and signing ability, it is advantageous for them to learn to produce well articulated speech.

Description of *SMILE*

SMILE develops a hierarchy of skills leading from phonology to morphology to syntax. It starts with the smallest unit of language, the phoneme, which is immediately associated with its written representation, the grapheme. As soon as the sound system and a number of words have been learned, syntax is taught through linguistic string formulas and sentence patterns.

The teaching progresses from simple to complex at each level of the curriculum.. Each increment of new linguistic material builds upon previously learned material. Each level stretches and expands the pupil's memory, up to where the pupil is required to memorize an entire story and answer questions about it.

SMILE succeeds because it is structured to provide as many cues as possible. At every turn, the pupil is conditioned to give a correct response, is

rewarded for that response, and is not permitted to deviate. The procedure informs the pupil what is expected at every moment.

Communication between home and school by means of books prepared by the teacher, based on what the pupil has learned, helps families cope better with their pupil's abilities and needs. There is less frustration on the part of both adults and pupils, so they are more comfortable with each other, which facilitates communication.

SMILE is helpful to use with deaf pupils who have language concepts but need specific help in production of sounds and sound sequences. A "lipreading step" is included to compensate for their lack of auditory reception.

Lessons using SMILE procedures are only part of the pupil's day. Aside from the structured SMILE periods in which pupils are expected to attend closely and respond precisely, the school day should allow opportunities for informal language exposure in which pupils can see and hear at their level without strain and failure. Concepts are taught using actions, gestures, pictures, objects and experiences.

The SMILE Curriculum

In addition to its logical approach to developing language in a orderly fashion, beginning with phonemes, the building blocks of speech, the SMILE approach incorporates: development of attention, specific and consistent teaching methodology, use of structure and routine, immediate reinforcement, successive approximations leading to exact repetition, pattern practice and substitution / transformation drills, and ongoing attention to generalization so the pupil does not end up with a series of splinter skills that are not broadly applicable or useful in everyday function.

The linguistic content in SMILE is taught via five language modules. A brief description of each module and the goals to be met are described below.

Language Module 1.

This module begins with attention-getting exercises, goes on to the teaching of single sounds and letters, and then consonant-vowel combinations. Beginning speech development material is supplemented with directed activities designed to teach habits of paying attention and giving exact responses, and to train the pupil to do independent seatwork. Even after the pupil learns to focus attention these exercises continue. The objective is to generalize attentive behavior to all instructional situations.

Goal : Preparation of the pupil for orderly learning and memory as well as use of initial sounds.

Language Module 2.

This module covers combining sounds into nouns, secondary spellings of phonemes, associating meaning with nouns that are seen or heard, writing readiness exercises and writing of nouns, and acoustic association —first sound elements, then nouns.

Goal: Pupils will say and write 50 nouns when shown a picture or object the nouns symbolize. This module also expands memory by means of activities which provide additional practice.

Language Module 3.

Module 3 teaches verbs, numbers, colors and plurals.

Goal: Pupils will learn additional vocabulary in order to be able to form longer sentences and to acquire the ability to give descriptions including colors and quantity.

Language Module 4.

Language module 4 begins the teaching of simple sentences such as:

I see_____. This is_____. I want_____.

Questions are introduced after each sentence is taught. A basic question chart uses the following questions:

What do you see?
What is this?
What do you want?
Who is this?
Can a _____ ___?

The possessive pronoun *my* is introduced by asking about photographs of parents, siblings, and classmates, "Who is this?"

Prepositions are taught beginning with in, on and under. Once they are taught, "Where is_____?" is added to question chart.

Goal: To expand capacity to memorize and retain in memory so that pupils can later use simple sentences, ask, and answer questions based on those sentences.

Language Module 5.

Module 5 concentrates on description stories. The first stories are about animals. At first they consist of not more than four sentences. Learning these stories by heart is required. Later stories progress to eight sentences and include descriptions of toys, cars, clothes, etc.

Through description stories new vocabulary, adjectives and number concepts are taught. New nouns and adjectives are recorded on strip charts. The pronouns he, she, his, her, your are introduced when working on descriptions of people .

- "*Round-Up*" stories combine all of the sentence types and concepts.

This is a picture of a house
The house is white
The roof is red
I see three windows and one door
A black dog is under the window

Goal: To expand memory so pupils will be able to read, write and tell simple descriptive stories.

Sample Teaching Methods

A key to the success of the pupil is the initial concentration on development of attention. Often pupils with severe communication problems have become frustrated or withdrawn. They have not had success with expressive and receptive speech-language production and have caused consternation among the adults working with them. This can lead to confusion on the part of adults with subsequent lack of consistent attention to pupil's problems —the opposite of what is really needed. Therefore, beginning speech development material needs to be preceded by and later supplemented with directed activities designed to teach and maintain habits of attention and exact response and to train the pupil to do independent seatwork. In SMILE these activities are referred to as "attention-getting exercises." These follow a particular pattern —

- Pupil is called.
- Pupil comes and stands on a line in front of the teacher.
- Pupil is given a command.

- The task is performed.
- Pupil awaits order to return to seat.

Beginning activities are limited to short, easily imitated tasks such as: motor activities (jumping, hopping, clapping, touching head or toes, various arm movements, throwing and catching, stacking blocks, etc. Also, beginning writing exercises where pupils draw strings on balloons, add features in circles to make faces and copy or trace circles and wavy lines. Pupils are also asked to imitate repetitive tongue movements and imitate noisemaker sounds. At this time there is no attempt to connect these activities with formal language training. However, such skills, to be learned and produced upon command by an instructor or under the control of the pupil, must be mastered before direct speech-language training can be successful.

Once pupils have success with attention getting exercises, they can begin to learn to imitate vocally and in writing some easily produced individual sounds and consonant-vowel combinations. This teaching also takes place in a structured setting using the procedures introduced in beginning lessons. The approach which we call SMILE is introduced to pupils in small groups of not more than 3 pupils or in individual tutoring sessions. If pupils are hyperactive or distractible, the teacher may conduct several preparatory lessons designed to establish the lesson routine and to prepare the pupil for group participation.

The major group lesson takes place during the beginning of the school day. It will always be the same time. This lesson takes place at the chalkboard, or in front of a large chart with the teacher writing with large crayons or markers that will also be easy for the pupil to handle. Teaching begins with short lessons (5 to 10 minutes) with the time increased gradually to a maximum time for the group lesson being 30 minutes. In addition, pupils will have

directed times with the teacher to work on guided writing in their books and on more precise sound production.

The SMILE program suggests an approximate order in which consonants and vowels are to be taught. Beginning sounds include those which are easy to produce such as [m, o, p, ee, i-e] Each sound is taught individually in a consistent manner using the following procedures

6 Steps in Teaching Phonemes

Step 1 Introducing new sounds
- Repeating sound after teacher
- Articulation practice.

Step 2 Tracing letter then articulating sound

Step 3 Copying letter then articulating sound

Step 4 Auditory Training/*Lip Reading**
- Teacher produces same sound aloud covering mouth as sound is presented
- Pupil repeats sound
- Pupil finds letter and points to it saying the sound
- Pupil traces the letter and articulates again.

Step 5 Saying sound from memory, or "reading."
- Pupil looks at letter and says sound (recalls without prompting).

Step 6 Writing letter from memory when teacher says sound.

**** The lip reading step is optional —used only when the pupil needs to learn that skill. Procedures are the same as for auditory training except that the pupil must watch the teacher's lips.***

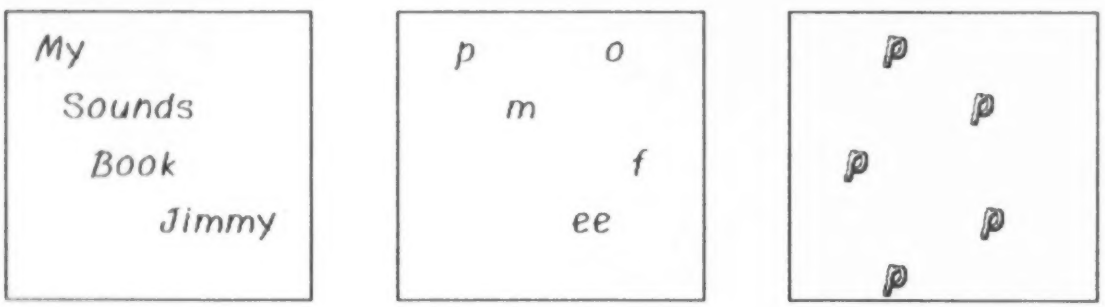
The SMILE method incorporates a variety of modalities so that at the end, without having made an issue of it, the pupil will not only be able to produce sounds but read and write them as well. For this reason the approach is also known as the association method.

The Pupil's Books

One of the features of the SMILE method is that each skill is built upon another. As soon as the pupil accomplishes a step, a new one is added. Along the way the teacher is developing a series of books with the pupil, geared specifically to the individual pupil, containing only those lessons which the pupil knows. Books are shared daily with the family.

Teacher made books are interesting and colorful and represent achievement for the pupil because he/she can sucessfully present their skills to their families. The first book includes the initial sounds that they have learned as well as a "dictionary" of sounds. These are used for reading and memory.

Model of *My Sounds Book*



After the pupil has learned the first four phonemes and letters, memory is expanded by combining two phonemes in a repetition of three unblended CV (consonant + vowel) syllables. The CV syllable drill is called a "drop drill" and is written as follows:

bee

bee

bee

Along with attention to the structure and routine, it is important to keep track of what the pupil has accomplished. This is done via a pupil record card.

Pupil: _____ *Birthdate:* _____ *Class:* _____

Skill	Sounds									
	p	*o*	*m*	*f*	*ee*	*b*	*i-e*	*t*	*k*	*o-e*
1 Repeats sound after teacher										
2 Traces letter										
3 Copies letter										
4 Points to letter(s) when hears sound or watches lips										
5 Says sound when shown letter										
6 Writes letter(s) when teacher says sound.										

After the initial teaching of phonemes and phoneme combinations in Module 1, Module 2 builds an initial vocabulary of 50 nouns by teaching additional phonemes, graphemes and secondary spellings, associating sound sequences with nouns, acoustic association, first with sound elements and then with nouns, expanding memory for sound sequences, and associating written words with a pictorial referent. The procedure to teach combining sounds into words is called a *Cross Drill*. It prepares pupils to read aloud, and to write the sound combinations that will later be used to develop nouns. At first only the

original 10 sounds are used. When the first 4 or 5 Cross Drills are completed, the same procedures are used to teach other sounds.

Example of completed "Cross Drill"

mop	mop	mop
meep	meap	meep
mipe	mipe	mipe
	mop	

Using this procedure a variety of words can now be learned. For example using a cross drill for the sound /b/ and several vowels:

Examples of words:

bone, boat, bow

bee, beet, bead, bean, beef

boot

bike, bite, bright

Cross Drill

bo-e	boa	bow
bee	bea	bee
boo	boo	boo
bi-e	bigh	bigh

When the group has learned a variety of words to which they now can attach meaning, the third module adds verbs, color names, number concepts and plural to expand the pupil's vocabulary. Particular methods are used to teach each one of these concepts. When the teacher is assured that the pupils can follow the patterns that are presented, pupils are allowed to take the place of the teacher and be the leader for their peers.

The final two language modules increase memory span by the use of short sentences, introduce articles and when a sentence is learned, a matching question is introduced. By this time the teacher has made additional word and language books for the pupils which also serve as a record of the pupil's progress, and as a link between home and school. The final step is the

production of animal and personal description stories and finally a "round-up" story as illustrated above.

Supporting materials

Materials for display in the classroom include, Noun Cards, Noun Picture Charts, Noun and Verb Word Lists, Picture Cards. These are all produced by the teacher working with the pupil. SMILE requires no commercial materials.

Summary

In effect, by following a very specific pattern of learning, the pupils have learned many skills which they can now apply to other learnings. It is important to remember that in using such a structured method, not one step can be missed or there will be a gap that may cause later problems. There is lots of room for creativity in the way the pupil books are made, the charts are designed, and development of stories. These are different for each pupil/classroom and can be varied however the teacher and pupil desire. If pupils have a special problem, for example, severe weakness in the hands, then modifications can be made.

Conclusion

When pupils have a specific language disability that does not prove amenable to natural language approaches, or "whole word" methods, a totally different approach may be helpful. We have offered such an approach, SMILE. a 75 page manual which explicitly describes the method is available in the USA from the Alexander Graham Bell Society for the Deaf (USA Tel: 202.337.8767; Fax: 202.337.8270.). Both English and Spanish versions are available. Workshops are also presented upon request by Dr. Wolf-Schein, the author. Contact—USA Tel: 305.978.1368 or Fax 305.968.3970 for additional information.